

Writing a Literature Review in APA Format

According to the *Publication Manual of American Psychological Association* (2010), Literature Reviews “are critical evaluations of material that has already been published.... By organizing, integrating, and evaluating previously published material, authors of literature reviews consider the progress of current research toward clarifying a problem” (10).

In a literature review, the authors

- Define and clarify the problem;
- Summarize previous investigations in order to inform the reader of the state of current research;
- Identify relations, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature; and
- Suggests the next step or steps in solving the problem.

Also, the components are arranged by **relationship**, such as: similar “concepts or theories of interest, methodological similarities among the studies reviewed, or the historical development of the field” (10).

The following information is adapted from: University of North Carolina’s Writing Center website: http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html

Purpose of literature reviews:

- They can provide an overview or act a springboard in discovering more about a topic.
- They can also provide strong background information for a research paper’s exploration.

Before you get started, determine:

- How many sources you should address
- What type of sources you should research (journal articles, websites, books?)
- If you are to evaluate your sources
- How current your sources need to be

Your Topic:

It is essential that you **narrow your topic** down to a specific element or idea. This will limit the number of sources you need to consult and will provide a much more unified survey of the research surrounding your topic.

Your Focus:

Your specific topic should then transform into a **focus**.

- Consider the themes and issues that link your sources together
 - Do your sources present the same or different explanations/solutions for an issue/problem?
 - Is there an aspect of your topic that is absent?
 - Do your sources point to a trend or debate in the field?

Thesis statement:

Use your focus to then formulate your **thesis statement**. Your thesis will probably not argue in favor of a position; it will instead make a claim for a specific perspective on the material.

Example: The current trend in teaching Science in the elementary school involves hands-on activities.

Educational theorists are increasingly favoring a more student-centered pedagogy.

Components of the Literature Review:

- *Introduction*: provides background information about your topic and lets your reader know the specific focus and thesis of the literature review.
 - In this section, you need to determine: if you will address the ‘current situation’ surrounding your topic; how much history of the topic should be included; and if you will explain the criteria used in selecting your sources.
- *Body*: the discussion of your research happens here.
- *Conclusion/Recommendations*: discuss what you can conclude/deduct based on reviewing the literature thus far. Address to where the discussion of your topic may next progress. What questions about your field/topic has the review generated?

Organization of the Body Section:

Three Choices:

1. *Chronological (based on the historical development of the topic)*.
 - a. Write about the materials according to their publication date only if this order will express an important trend. For example, as the publication dates progressed, the research reflected changing views regarding treating a particular learning disorder
 - b. Write about the materials according to trend. In other words, focus on your topic according to its history and progression. This will not necessarily mean that you start with older sources and progress to newer sources. For example, you may have a recently published source that addresses the practices of Math teachers in the 1800's, but might talk about that source first because its focus is so historic.
2. *Thematic*. This type of review is organized around a specific topic or issue. A thematic review looks at a topic according to the many factors and dimensions surrounding it—which are usually not chronological. For example, you may organize your review on childhood language acquisition by arranging your sources according to geography or culture. Or, a review on teaching methods in urban schools may be arranged by the various disciplines the research addresses.

3. *Methodological*. This type of organization is based on the ‘methods’ of the researchers or writers—the ways in which each author approaches the topic. For example, you may be focusing on **how** the various researchers investigate childhood trauma.

Writing the Draft:

- *Keep your own voice!* Even though this type of writing puts a lot of emphasis on research, your voice should still be on the front burner! Maintain your own voice by starting and ending paragraphs with your own wording and ideas. The sources should be supporting the thesis statement and ideas that YOU came up with.
- *Use evidence*. While keeping your own voice is essential, it is also important to make sure you **show and explain** what your sources say in order to fully support your points.
- *Be selective*. Use only the most important points from each source that relate to your focus.
- *Use direct quotes in moderation*. Use short quotes ONLY if you need to emphasize a point or if what the author says simply cannot be rewritten in your own words.
- *Be careful when paraphrasing*. Make sure that you represent the author’s ideas **accurately** and in your own words. In order for this to happen, you must fully understand the author’s wording and ideas.
- *Summarize and synthesize*. Do this with each paragraph or source. After describing each source’s ideas, be certain to relate it back to your thesis—why is this source significant in terms of your main point?

Resources:

Literature reviews. (2005). Retrieved from University of North Carolina’s Writing Center:
http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2010). (6th ed.). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

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